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AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY.

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN
HAMILTON AND WASHINGTON.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL,

OCTOBER 22, 1883.

Worcester, Mass., U. S. A.:
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REPORT OF THE COUNCIL.

THE Council respectfully present to the American Antiquarian Society a report for the seventy-first anniversary. The report of Nathaniel Paine, Esq., Treasurer, to the Council, is presented as a lucid statement of the finances of the Society in the care of that able and faithful officer, who is equally distinguished by his antiquarian labors. This report, approved by the Auditors, requires little comment. The aggregate of funds, \$77,181.31, with a diminished and decreasing income, will appear insufficient for the increasing labors and expenses occasioned by the enlargement and more active use of the library. In our past experience, these exigencies have been supplied by self-sacrifice, voluntary work and timely gifts. But there is a limit to this. The most urgent need is in the Publication Fund; and this presents itself in such a "questionable shape," that we will hope for favorable responses as in time past. An incident that occurred when the Treasurer was finishing his report, encourages us to rely on the good-will of our friends. He pleasantly mentions the gift of one hundred dollars for the Publishing Fund from our associate, Rev. Robert C. Waterston, to whom the Society has been repeatedly indebted for contributions of his learning and taste to aid its progress.

The report of Mr. Edmund M. Barton, the Librarian, to the Council, is presented as an interesting and satisfactory account of his department. It would be unnecessary and unfair to select the attractive details for the improvement of this communication, but there is occasion for a few remarks. The library must be considered, first in its

operation, and second in its condition and its growth. It is, in an uncommon degree, the heart of our society; the fountain of its life and action. Most of the numerous valuable writings published by the Society are connected with the library in the way of suggestion or assistance. Much of the time and pains of Mr. Barton and of Mr. Reuben Colton, the Assistant-Librarian, has been employed in directing, supplying and corresponding with investigators, in addition to the duty of producing books that are asked for. The simple statement of Mr. Barton, that there were more investigators in the library this summer than ever before in the warm season, indicates a large amount of patient and generous labor. Such investigations can be noticed only in general terms; for it would be offensive and injurious to expose to the public the private studies of scholars. It is known to the Council that the Librarians have been cheered in this work by grateful acknowledgment of such benefits as the effect of a contemporary map to illustrate one of the earliest battles of our colonies, or of a forgotten book that gave a new or a stronger light to a passage of history.

The little book containing a "Partial Index to the Proceedings," by Mr. Stephen Salisbury, Jr., and "a table of the contents" of the *Archæologia Americana* and other separate publications of the Society, by Mr. Nathaniel Paine, brings into light the forgotten fruit of faithful antiquarian study. It is brief and partial for economy and convenience. But it is large enough to make the Society and its doings better known.

It is the happiness of this Society that it has been recognized as an institution useful and worthy of support by those who have not the duties of membership. In the last half-year there has been given by members ninety-one books and seven hundred and eleven pamphlets; by friends three hundred and eighty-two books and one thousand three hundred and four pamphlets.

The good that Hon. Isaac Davis did to the Society, lived after him in the generous gift from his family of one thousand three hundred and four valuable books from his library, and other desirable objects mentioned by the Librarian.

In the last month this Society had the privilege of applying the legacy of \$5,000, from John J. Cooke, Esq., of Providence, R. I., to the purchase of books at the second auction sale of his costly library. After careful study and marking of the sale catalogue by the Librarians, with the assistance of Mr. Nathaniel Paine, Mr. Barton bought seven hundred good and needed volumes in excellent editions. It is said the third and last sale will offer the American books, which are most interesting to us. The scheme adopted by Mr. Cooke to distribute his rich library where it will do most good, by the privilege of purchase to the amount of \$5,000, given to ten institutions, works smoothly, and promises to accomplish the best results.

In the last six months this Society has received from various sources mentioned in the Librarian's report, three thousand and two bound volumes, three thousand two hundred and sixteen pamphlets, and one hundred and nine volumes of newspapers. The time has come when those who have entertained the ambition for the size of our library, must give it up. It is not easy to find the best places for the last accession. The building cannot be extended without difficulty. The growth of a library is not an unmixed good. It is possible to put many books on shelves above the alcoves, but it is not possible to use them freely there. It is an old notion with us, and it has recently been made popular, that a library like silver has no beauty, "*nisi temperato splendeat usu.*" The books in our library are so well selected and they are so connected together, that they cannot be reduced by decimation. The necessity of growth to the life of a library, and other considerations, invite us to a discussion for which there is

no time. The evil threatens those who come after us, and their wisdom may devise a remedy.

In the last six months this Society had occasion to take notice of the finished work of two respected associates. On May 12, 1883, Hon. Israel Washburn, Jr., LL.D., of Portland, Maine, died suddenly of heart disease at Philadelphia, where he was receiving medical treatment for his impaired health. He was born in Livermore, Maine, June 6, 1813. He was a worthy member of a family distinguished for enterprise and success in business, and for public service. He began mature life as a lawyer, and it is said he was successful; but he was soon engaged in productive business, and was called to public duties. He had a high reputation for integrity, good judgment and administrative ability. After serving in the Legislature of his State, he was a member of Congress from 1851 to 1861, and was recognized as a leader there. From 1861 to 1863, the most anxious period of the late civil war, he was the Governor of Maine, and he has a brilliant record for giving efficiency to the patriotic contributions of that State by labors that were supposed to be the cause of the decay of his health in his last years. He accepted membership in this Society in April, 1882, with cordiality, and sent to the library his valuable published writings, chiefly historical and prepared for the Maine Historical Society. His brief membership gives us only the satisfaction of remembering him as a collateral worker and an honorable associate.

Hon. John Denison Baldwin, A.M., who died at his home in Worcester, on the 8th of July last, had a threefold connection with this Society. 1st. He was the successor of Dr. Isaiah Thomas, our founder, in being a proprietor and an able and prosperous editor of the *Massachusetts Spy*,¹ a weekly newspaper established by Dr. Thomas in 1770, when he was twenty-one years old, to sustain the

¹A daily edition, the *Worcester Daily Spy*, was established by the late John Milton Earle, July 25, 1845, and is still issued.

patriotism of the country, and Mr. Baldwin carried it on with the same purpose. 2d. Mr. Baldwin displayed his kinship with us, by his volumes on Prehistoric Man and Ancient America, the fruit of antiquarian studies of which he was fond. 3d. Since he was elected a member in 1869, he has made valuable additions to this library, from his opportunities as a publisher; and in 1878 on occasion of the reinterment of Dr. Thomas, he gave a very interesting account of the first years of his newspaper.

Mr. Baldwin was born in North Stonington, Conn., September 28, 1809. He studied as an undergraduate and in the Divinity School of Yale College, and afterwards received from that learned institution, the honorary degree of Master of Arts. His education was obtained with difficulty, but it was well grounded and progressive. He was a calm and forcible reasoner. In speech he was not fluent or graceful, but the language of his pen was distinct and persuasive. His large frame and grave utterance did not promise the variety and adaptation that were found in his life and writings. He began as a clergyman, and preached in a Methodist church, and successively in three Congregational churches, where he is remembered with respect and satisfaction. In the Legislature of Connecticut, as Chairman of the Committee on Education, he introduced the bill to incorporate the first Normal school of that State. His published writings were various, and among them was a volume of poems printed in his youth. His duties in the Legislature led him to acquaint himself with political management and to engage in journalism, for which he had great capacity. He was a member of Congress for six years of faithful service. He returned home to occupy the decline of his life with editorial labors for his time-honored journal, and with historical studies and writings, in which he took much pleasure.

In conformity with custom, the Council will add, as an expression of active sympathy in the studies of the

Society, a suggestion of the true nature of an incident in the life of Alexander Hamilton. For the accuracy of this the writer only is responsible.

Alexander Hamilton was distinguished for so many and so various great qualities that he stands out among the most remarkable men of his time. His pride led him to defy enemies; his ability was so joined to attractive manners and friendship for the worthy who were in distress, that he drew to himself the strongest affection of his friends. He had so nice a sense of propriety in pecuniary affairs that though he could ill spare it, he gave up his own claim on the United States for half-pay at the end of the war, that he might be the more free to support the just demands of his comrades and associates. Washington had been one of the first to discern his superior abilities, and gave him a place in his military family, and retained for him affection and confidence to the last hour of his life. No one has paid in words so full a tribute to his merits as Washington has done, or drawn his character so well. The bar of New York esteemed him in his day, as its ablest member; his political friends in the State of New York looked to him always for ideas, if not always for wisest practical counsel. Scarce another of his time was so remarkable in the variety of the pursuits in which he excelled, using well the sword, the pen, and the voice. He stands before the world as in his day the most genial representative of the opinions which he supported; at the same time his articles in the *Federalist* interpreting the federal constitution, are marked by moderation. It is one of the beautiful elements of his character that, though, as he says himself, he was perhaps of all who accepted the Federal Constitution the one that liked it the least, his patriotism led him to be one of its ablest and firmest and most effective defenders.

Hamilton has a peculiar right to be judged by all parties not with candor only but with the wish that every investigation about him may turn out to his honor. When an

attempt was made to thwart the will of the country by the defeat of Jefferson after he had been elected to the Presidency, and when the federalists had carried their resistance to excess, Hamilton broke away from them and employed all his force of will and power of persuasion on the side of Jefferson ; bearing testimony from his own personal knowledge that he would not in his administration give up one tittle of the power that justly belonged to the federal government. For this he was pursued with the bitter and inflexible hatred of the man whose iniquitous aspirations he assisted to defeat, and who at last found an opportunity to assuage persistent hatred in his blood.

On the sixteenth of February, 1781, Alexander Hamilton ceased to be a member of the family of General Washington. The real cause of his retirement was his impatience at being in a situation where his labors were constant and engrossing but entirely private and obscure, giving him no opportunity whatever to distinguish himself “conspicuously” in the war. His labors were entirely those of the closet, attracting no public attention and followed by no general applause. The manner in which he performed his duties justifies Washington’s judgment of his ability. The Marquis de Chastellux¹ told all that needed to be told on the subject, when he said that Washington in selecting

¹ Le Colonel Hamilton, né à Sainte-Croix, et depuis quelque tems établi en Amérique, se destinoit à la profession des Loix, et avoit à peine achevé ses études, lorsque le Général Washington, instruit comme tous les grands-hommes, à découvrir les talens et à les employer, le fit à-la-fois son Aide-de-Camp et son Secrétaire, place aussi éminente qu’importante dans l’armée Américaine. Dès lors la correspondance avec les François, dont il parle et écrit parfaitement bien la langue, les détails de toute espece, politiques et militaires dont il fut chargé, développerent les talens que le Général avoit su appercevoir et mettre en activité, tandis que le jeune militaire justifioit par une prudence et un secret encore plus au-dessus de son âge que ses lumieres, la confiance dont il se trouvoit honoré. Il avoit toujours continué de servir en cette qualité, lorsqu’en 1781, desirant de se distinguer dans le commandement des troupes, comme dans les autres fonctions qu’il avoit exercées, il prit celui d’un bataillon d’infanterie légère. Voyages de M. Le Marquis de Chastellux Dans L’Amerique Septentrionale, Dans les années 1780, 1781 et 1782. Seconde Edition. Tome Premier. A Paris, 1788. Pp. 311, 312, n.

Hamilton for his staff proved his quickness to discern superior ability, and that Hamilton justified the choice by his prudence, secrecy, and intelligence. The letters and papers which Hamilton prepared as secretary of the commander-in-chief are considerable in number, but not disproportionate to the length of time in which he served as secretary. He filled up Washington's idea of a good secretary, as one who should not be simply a copyist but able "to think"¹ for his employer. To a person who did not feel the craving for acting in the eye of the public, the position of Hamilton would have been as desirable as it was honorable; but the work as we know from himself, was performed with ever increasing disgust and discontent. Here lies the true and it may be said complete statement of the causes of Hamilton's retirement from the family of Washington. It was the result of a long continued condition of restless impatience to gain a name in the world by public action in the light of day. Any inquiry about the particular state of that feeling at any particular moment is needless. Chastellux in the passage above cited, says all that needs to be said on the subject. Hamilton in 1781 was "desirous of distinguishing himself in the command of troops."

But, since it has been attempted to give a different coloring to the incident, it is proper to view it in all the light that can be brought to bear on it.

And here a difficulty arises in the beginning. Hamilton requested Washington to preserve silence on the manner of their parting, promising to do the like. Washington acceded to the request, and not a word among his papers is to be found on the subject; yet letters enough exist to show the state of mind and feelings of Hamilton. And besides, when the editor of Washington's writings was with Lafayette at La Grange, long before the *Life of Hamilton*

¹ Sparks's Washington, III., 258.

by John C. Hamilton appeared, the General set the subject in its true light for the guidance of Washington's future biographer.

With the use of authentic papers and the communication of Lafayette who passed repeatedly between Washington and Hamilton, the occurrence may be traced from its origin.

On the fourteenth of October, 1780, Greene was appointed to the command in the South. Hamilton spoke to Washington "about going to the South." On the twenty-second of November of that year Hamilton wrote to Washington: "Dear Sir, Some time last fall, when I spoke to your Excellency about going to the southward, I explained to you candidly my feelings with respect to military reputation, and how much it was my object to act a conspicuous part in some enterprise that might raise my character as a soldier above mediocrity. You were so good as to say you would be glad to furnish me with an occasion. When the expedition to Staten Island was on foot, a favorable one seemed to offer. There was a battalion without a Field-Officer, the command of which I thought, as it was accidental, might be given to me without inconvenience. I made an application for it through the Marquis, who informed me of your refusal, on two principles; one, that giving me a whole battalion might be a subject of dissatisfaction; the other, that, if an accident should happen to me in the present state of your family, you would be embarrassed for the necessary assistance.

The project you now have in contemplation, affords another opportunity. I have a variety of reasons that press me to desire ardently to have it in my power to improve it."¹

Nothing came of this third application. Just at that time the office of adjutant-general became vacant. Hamil-

¹ Sparks's Washington, III., 152.

ton himself recommended to Washington Brigadier-general Hand for the station.¹ Lafayette who had been Hamilton's very intimate friend agreeably to the ideas of the world, had increased his friendship to a "point that the world knows nothing about." In the conversation between the two, Lafayette promised to use his influence with Washington to obtain the post of adjutant-general for Hamilton; and he sent to Hamilton an outline of the letter of solicitation which on the twenty-eighth of November he addressed to Washington. In that letter he recommended the appointment of Hand or Smith, naming Hand first, but yet, on every public and private account advised him to take Hamilton. But while Lafayette was writing his letter Washington had left New Windsor for Morristown, where he fell in with Hand, at once made him the offer of the place, and in consequence of his acceptance wrote the letter to Congress for his appointment on or before the day on which Lafayette had written his letter in favor of Hamilton. Lafayette himself met Washington before his letter had been received; and he showed his friendship for Hamilton by asking the commander-in-chief to recall the appointment which, however, he very well knew to be a good one. Washington refused to recall it, and to Greene who had interested himself on the occasion, he soon afterward thus assigned his reasons:

"Without knowing that Colonel Hamilton ever had an eye to the office of adjutant-general, I did, upon the application of Colonel Scammell to resign it, recommend General Hand for reasons which may occur to you. One of them, and not the smallest, was, by having an officer of rank appointed, to guard against the discontents, which would have arisen in the inspector's department, if a junior officer to the present sub-inspectors had been appointed; for you know, that, by the present establishment of the

¹ Works of Hamilton, I., 199. "Greatly in consequence of your advice." Lafayette to Hamilton, 9 December, 1780.

inspection, the adjutant-general for the time being is the second officer in the line. It would have been disagreeable therefore to the present sub-inspectors, some of whom are full colonels, to have a lieutenant-colonel put over them.”¹

There was every reason in favor of the preference of Hand. He had been about a year longer in the service than Hamilton, had as colonel commanded the regiment in which Hamilton was a captain, had served with ability and distinction, and had obtained the rank of brigadier-general. Lafayette perceived the mistake he had himself made and owned it to Hamilton, saying: “I may have been a little blinded on the propriety of the measure.”

Here were four disappointments in rapid succession, but where General Washington appears to have acted in every case with justice and wisdom. Another disappointment followed from the action of Congress, who unwisely withheld from him a position to which he had superior claims. A mission was to be sent to France to request aid for the army and it was held that the envoy should be a member of Washington’s staff. Hamilton was the ablest member of that staff, and moreover, spoke and wrote French thoroughly well. Lafayette exerted himself to obtain this appointment for Hamilton; he paid visits to members of Congress; and was so certain of success that he prepared to send an express to Hamilton so soon as his appointment should be made. So sure of it was he, that he promised Hamilton to prepare for him an unusual reception in Paris and give him all the introductions that he could to the society of the ablest and most important of the statesmen of France, and to the members of the highest circle in social life in its capital.²

“But Colonel Hamilton was not sufficiently known to Congress to unite their suffrages in his favor;”³ so wrote

¹ Sparks’s Washington, VII., 321.

² Hamilton’s Works, I., 200.

³ Laurens to Washington, 11 December, 1780; J. C. Hamilton’s History of the Republic, II., 144.

Laurens to Washington. No member of Congress appears to have pressed Hamilton's appointment. Laurens was supported by all the influence that belonged to his father, who was of South Carolina and had been president of Congress, and he himself was most heartily loved by everybody that knew him. He was accordingly selected for the place almost without competition. Hamilton suppressed every complaint; and was one of the foremost to announce to Laurens his satisfaction with the choice, but ever-increasing discontent was finding its way into his heart. He brooded with bitterness on the thought that he had, as it were, concealed his ability in a kind of service that had one part of its merit in being secret. A feeling of morbid displeasure with himself for having left the line grew stronger and stronger within him. There rose in his mind the suspicion that there was something of selfishness in Washington, as though he was disposed to retain him as his secretary for the very reason that he did his work so well. It is on this state of things that Lafayette threw a clear light by explaining to Sparks as the future historian of Washington, that Hamilton in the routine of his duty, repeatedly in his intercourse with the commander-in-chief passed beyond the bounds of the respect that was his due.

With this knowledge of Hamilton's state of mind let us turn to Hamilton's account of the parting interview, the only account that exists of it. He relates that meeting him on the stairs, the General told him he wanted to speak to him. Hamilton instead of waiting to receive the orders of the commander-in-chief brushed on saying he would wait upon him immediately. He went below, delivered a letter to another officer, and fell in with the Marquis de Lafayette with whom he conversed on a matter of business for what he represents as "about a minute." He found Washington still waiting for him at the head of the stairs after an absence of ten minutes, which Hamilton professes to have thought but two. Washington accosted him, saying: "I

must tell you, sir, you treat me with disrespect," and he certainly had treated him with wilful disrespect, and, as he and Washington knew and as Lafayette reports, had done it several times before.¹ The reproof of the young aide-de-camp who had repeatedly slighted the commander-in-chief, was deserved and was necessary, and was given in very moderate terms. Hamilton, who not long before had received from Washington a letter which began, "My dear Hamilton," and ended, "sincerely and affectionately yours," replied: "I am not conscious of it, sir, but since you have thought it necessary to tell me so, we part."

Hamilton was still in the petulant humor which he had manifested before, and as he left Washington went directly to Lafayette to give him an account of the interview.²

The narrative of Hamilton which has been published, professes to be not from a letter but only from a draft; and no one knows what variations from that draft Hamilton may have made in copying it for the eye of his father-in-law. General Schuyler appears to have destroyed the letter which he received; for after thorough search made many years ago, it could not be found among his papers; nor is

¹ Extract of a letter from Jared Sparks to George Bancroft:

" *Cambridge, April 14, 1859.*

As to Lafayette's account of Hamilton's difference with Washington, I find it agrees mainly with Hamilton's letter to Schuyler. (Life, I., 333.) I understood, however, that there had been neglect previously to the incident on the stairs, which would account for Washington's abrupt and unusual manner on that occasion. Lafayette said that he urged Hamilton to return to his post, and let the affair subside; but this he declined, adding that he had wanted to retire for some time, and was willing to have an opportunity. It is known that Hamilton had urged Washington to give him a command in the army, but this was delayed on the ground that it could not then be done without interfering with the claims of other officers. Ambitious of being in a higher sphere than that of aide-de-camp, and suspicious that Washington designed to retain him in that place for the benefit of his services, he became impatient, and this seems to have been the real cause of his disaffection.

Very truly yours,

JARED SPARKS."

² Compare Irving's Life of Washington, IV., 230, 231. Henry Cabot Lodge: Life of Hamilton, 21, and 297.

the draft to be found among the Hamilton papers, that are in the possession of the United States.

The first remark is, that the printed paper is one which Hamilton himself preserved. Washington, the other party of the interview, having at the request of Hamilton kept silent as to the circumstances of the rupture, Hamilton was bound to do the same. He committed a grave error in preserving for other generations a copy of his own statement, privately and one might say secretly made, after he had imposed silence upon the person with whom he had held the interview.¹

Next: Hamilton in making his excuses to his father-in-law is not altogether ingenuous; he does not give as a reason that he was anxious to "play a conspicuous part as a military man;" and he introduces a statement of his own antecedent mental deliberations which there does not seem the least reason for him to have made.

Further, Lafayette, the very first² person to whom Hamilton related what had happened, Tilghman, and every other one of his friends whom he made privy to the affair, including his own father-in-law, advised him to go back and resume his place as secretary.

If we look outside of the record and ask whether it may have been expected of Washington that in reproving

¹ Lafayette to Washington, 15 April, 1781. "Considering the footing I am upon with your Excellency, it would appear to you strange, that I never mentioned a circumstance, which lately happened in your family. I was the first who knew of it, and from that moment exerted every means in my power to prevent a separation, which I knew was not agreeable to your Excellency. To this measure I was prompted by affection for you; but I thought it was improper to mention anything about it, until you were pleased to impart it to me."

Washington's reply to Lafayette. "Head-Quarters, 22 April, 1781. The event, which you seem to speak of with regret, my friendship for you would most assuredly have induced me to impart to you in the moment it happened, had it not been for the request of Hamilton, who desired that no mention should be made of it. Why this injunction on me, while he was communicating it himself, is a little extraordinary. But I complied and religiously fulfilled it." Sparks's Washington, VIII., 22, and note.

² Sparks's Washington, VIII., 22, note.

Hamilton he would have proceeded beyond the bounds of propriety, it must be answered, that if there be any one quality ascribed to Washington universally by every one, friends or those not his friends, it is that he was perfectly amiable. I have had in my hands thousands of letters written during the period of the revolutionary war, and in no one of them is there the least approach to a complaint of a want of perfect courtesy on the part of Washington. The camp is itself the great school of self-possession and reserve and reciprocal courtesy. To that Washington super-added the greatest possible kindness of nature. There is no record of a complaint from any one on this score, except General Lee whom Washington publicly reproved and as publicly insisted that the language which he used in reproof was that of decorum and duty.

As to Hamilton's services as secretary nobody is disposed to undervalue them, but as to whether he was a subordinate or a primal mover, the *experimentum crucis* decides the question; for no one who takes up Washington's papers, and in this opinion the editor of his writings perfectly agreed, can tell where Hamilton's services as secretary began or where they ended. From his abrupt departure from Washington's family he lost for himself the opportunity of having been consulted, when Washington made the magnanimous appeal to all the States in favor of union; an appeal of which Hamilton at the time did not comprehend the grandeur and the importance. For his fame in after life the early service in Washington's immediate vicinity was needed; for by it he learned to watch from the central point the course of events throughout the United States, and so was in the best school of preparation for the public service.

For the Council.

GEORGE BANCROFT,
STEPHEN SALISBURY,
Committee.

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